THE SILENT SEMINARY

You hear a lot more about other educational institutions, but very little about the seminaries and that’s surprising because they are the only kind of educational institutions that are sort of licensed—in a sense, obligated—to do good works and speak out. But you just don’t hear it.

Presbyterian church member

I would guess that the community generally does not have any idea what [the local seminary] is all about.

Chamber of Commerce official

I’m ashamed to say I know relatively little about [the local seminary].

Episcopal church executive

It has become painfully obvious how unknown we are.

Seminary president

In the city as a whole people probably know it’s there, but if you asked them if it has ever made any difference in your life, the answer would be, no.

Methodist church member

It’s not as if people in my aerobics class are talking about the seminary.

College chaplain

I frankly don’t hear people talk about [the local seminary] as a source of real leadership for either seminarians or lay people. I’ve visited a couple of times out of curiosity more than anything, but I don’t think much about it.

University president

For the most part, most community sort of folks look at seminary as sort of just a marginal sort of institution that doesn’t really have much. It’s not a player in society in training people, or it’s just not a player.

Methodist church member

WHERE ARE THE CHURCHES?

People in social services [say], “Where are the churches?”

Community organizer

I’m not seeing Church leaders affecting the broader culture very effectively here. I’m not even sure if they’re trying.

Religion reporter
A lot of [religious leaders] are just focused on their own congregations and memberships.

Religion reporter

We can have a good time on Sunday, everybody shout and get happy, and then we go out, and that’s it. People who didn’t come here on Sunday are still not being touched by us.

Baptist minister

[The churches] tend to be very territorial, very possessive, their people, their kind. I guess they’re afraid that somehow the fold will see something else and wander away from their church.

Presbyterian minister

There is not a functional working relationship among the pastors in this town. All of our energy is taken under the incredible pressure to be a successful church.

Community organizer

We’re across four lanes of traffic from the state capital building, but we might as well be in an outlying suburb for all the state building knows of [our church]. And I think that’s true for most of the churches.

Presbyterian minister

I don’t see--for the most part--religious leaders talking about everyday issues, and I never see them unless they represent some African American parishes or congregations. . . . It just seems to me that if you want to impact people’s lives you need to be active in people’s lives.

Chamber of Commerce official

Organized religion to some degree has lost sight of what I think is its primary role, which is caring for communities, and I think it has become focused on marketing to the flock.

Chamber of Commerce official

I don’t always agree with [my parish priest], but I think it’s neat that there’s a letter to the editor about something that’s not typically a religious topic. I’m excited to see him off the religion page, and why aren’t we seeing more religious leaders off the religion page?

Roman Catholic church member

GREEK AND ALL THAT
They teach them Greek, and they teach them Hebrew, and all, but they are not socially motivated.

Disciples of Christ church member

If all of the faculty are locked in little rooms making students memorize Greek, can they also bring people along to run these large, corporate parishes and also help the Church to have clear thinking about how to have a range of ways for ministry to unfold?

University official

[In too many seminaries] emphasis is put on the Greek end of it and the study end of it and not enough on the practical end of it.

Baptist church member

There is only so much Greek you need to know, but you need the Holy Spirit to get up in that pulpit.

Disciples of Christ church member

The theological and knowledge part is very very important: interpretation of the bible, that’s extremely important, but I think even more important is how you relate that knowledge to the people you serve.

Roman Catholic church member

You’d have to have the theology and what you believe, because if you have marketing without substance it’s nothing . . . But then add more of a practical component to the education, ranging from computers . . .[to] small group dynamics.

Religion reporter

I think [a seminary education] gives you discipline. But it certainly doesn’t give you the Spirit of God that you should have.

Disciples of Christ church member

I have the sense that there’s an awful lot of philosophical theology coming out of the schools as opposed to practical applications.

Business leader

If I had a choice, though, I would take the theological and biblical study over the practical. You can pick up the practical; you won’t pick up the study.

Methodist church minister

REACH OUT AND TOUCH SOMEONE
I would love to see this institution... not just teaching and encouraging and nurturing students on campus, but dealing with wider social issues in a way that appeals to the community to respond... There is no organization that does that.

Seminary trustee

I think the [Roman Catholic] church, and churches in general, could be even more out in the community if their people were schooled more in how to reach out to the community, and how to be involved in it, and how to deliver their message.

Business leader

Get out of those classrooms sometime, get out to meet the real people talk to the people, and see what they need.

Religion reporter

My wish is that as a part of the curriculum of seminaries there be a more intentional relationship with the world... It’s important for seminaries to consistently seek intentional ways to get out of the [church] walls.

Episcopal church member

I would hope that seminaries would work to try to inculcate religious leaders with a sense that there is a civic dimension to the practice of religion in our country that is legitimate, and should not be discouraged. [Clergy ought not just] be ‘good girls and boys” and just minister to their communicants’ needs and help them with their personal journeys through life... If I have a message it would be: Train civicly engaged leaders.

Elected official

I think people who are about to become pastors need to be able to speak to a community broader than their own congregation... They ought to be encouraged... to realize they have a voice, and I think an obligation, to speak out with and for a faith community in a broader community.

Presbyterian church member

RECRUITMENT COUNTS

[In the old days] only the best students were asked by their teachers, “What about seminary? What about religious life?” We drew from the very best and it was considered a privilege and an honor to do something like that and to attend the seminary... In the old days a person who was in a seminary could literally be anything else he chose. That would not be the case today.

Seminary president
Quality breeds quality; seminaries must do a better job of admitting students of talent and ability.

Foundation executive

I would question the selection process— that the applicants the seminaries are taking in are weak to begin with. Are these people who are just looking for a job?

Business leader

**GREAT EXPECTATIONS**

Churches should try to help with the development of the moral fiber of the society. . . . I think that religious leaders have to stand out as that kind of moral cornerstone or bright light so that, you know, the message is clear.

Community organizer

The gap between the underclass and those persons who are privileged is getting wider and wider and somehow it’s going to be left up to religious leaders to . . . make those persons who are privileged realize that they are privileged because of the blessing of God.

Political leader

It will be the churches that save society, because none of [the] other forces have any moral component.

Business leader